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SOCIETIES AND ACADEMIES

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

THE 462d regular meeting of the Anthropological Society of Washington, D. C., was held in the New Museum Building, Washington, on October 15, 1912.

Major Sylvester, superintendent of police for the District of Columbia, read a very interesting practical paper concerning criminal characteristics. It began with a brief review of the history of crime and the succession of different kinds of crimes prevalent at different periods, beginning with the cruder, such as homicide and tending toward the subtler, so that quite recently the green goods man has become less conspicuous than the forger and embezzler. The general government, it continued, has been urged to establish a national bureau of criminal identification, but such cooperative work has been left to the heads of American police departments.

It pointed out the practical difficulties of establishing a standard of the normal human being, and the imperfection of our distinction of crim-

inals therefrom, since the police tests are applied only to those who have broken the law and many are non-criminal simply from lack of occasion. Also, we are learning that many cases of apparent criminality are only cases of mental defect or disease.

The popular impression of the criminal as a hungry, shifty individual is erroneous. The average man who makes crime a business in large cities is a fairly prosperous individual, with no fear of arrest. Some of the anatomical characteristics which Lombroso thought decisive of criminality are common in the lower races of man, whether criminal or not. Measurements in general would give racial characteristics rather than criminal.

A number of criminals charged with murder were compared in detail, with the result of showing many varieties of human appearance bracketed together.

Some special kinds of crime call for peculiarities of appearance and develop them, but with these exceptions the criminal does not usually have a different aspect from that of other people, though both criminal and non-criminal of the police classification differ among themselves. Stress was laid on conditions as largely determining the category to which a man would belong.

The paper was discussed by Drs. Hrdlička, Frank Baker, Hough, Glueck and others. The former two gentlemen chiefly emphasized the unreliability of external peculiarities relied on by Lombroso and of every sort of test which has been devised for general distinctions. Dr. Hrdlička insisted that crime is a matter of the nerves and brain or the mentality and criminal characteristics may be more due to organs and parts which are hidden than to the obvious and chiefly irrelevant external ones which Lombroso depended upon for his diagnosis. Dr. Hough chiefly explained tattooing as devoid of significance in primitive conditions, but in civilization a survival ordinarily indicating some weakness which might predispose to crime. Dr. Glueck stated his practical experience in charge of the criminal branch of the Government Hospital for the Insane and the necessity which was felt of learning all about a man's past and conditions and his behavior at every stage of his life rather than trusting to his behavior or condition at the time of any one act as a proof of criminality.

Major Sylvester condemned the evil influence of politics in preventing the police of some large cities from bringing criminals to justice.